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NSC BRIEFING

18 February 1957

STATUS OF SUEZ CANAL CLEARANCE

I. Operations to complete limited transit at standstill. Nasr says inaction by agreement among Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

- A. Two major physical obstacles to limited transit remain.
- B. Both allegedly contain explosives to be removed by Egyptians.
- C. Reports explosive removal has begun not confirmed.
- D. 8 to 10 days work needed to remove these two obstacles once signal given by Egypt.
- 1. UN authorities proceeding with work associated phase two--unlimited transit.

II. Present passage limited to vessels under 1,000 tons.

- A. Two small Egyptian vessels transited on 17 Feb.
- B. 1900 ton Italian tanker ordered to turn back.

III. Ancillary services--tugs, pilots, signal equipment--reported adequate at least for the reduced volume expected initially.

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STATUS OF SUEZ CANAL CLEARANCE

I. Operations to complete the first phase of clearance--a channel permitting transit for vessels up to 10,000 tons or up to 25 foot draft--are reportedly at a "standstill." Hasr told Ambassador Hare on 14 February this inaction, like Syria's refusal to allow repair of the pipeline, had been agreed to by Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

A. There are two major physical obstacles to limited transit: the tug Edgar Bonnet, near Ismailiya, and the frigate Abukir near Suez.

B. Both vessels according to Egyptian authorities contain explosives which they maintain must be removed by the Egyptians before UN removal operations can begin.

C. Press reports that Egyptian frogmen are beginning to remove the explosives are not confirmed.

1. The American consul in Port Said has reported that removal of these alleged explosives was to have begun in late January but that as of mid-February nothing was being done.

D. Once Egyptian authorities give the UN permission to begin removal of the Bonnet and Abukir an estimated 8 to 12 days' work would be necessary to complete the first phase.

(Informal US Navy estimate as of 18 February).

1. In the meantime UN salvage forces are proceeding to work associated with phase two--unlimited transit--and are removing smaller obstacles.

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II. Present passage through the canal is limited to vessels under 1,000 tons.

- A. Two small Egyptian vessels, both under 400 tons, completed the run from Port Said to Suez on 17 February.
- B. But a 1900 ton Italian tanker under charter to Egypt which entered the canal on 9 February was ordered by Egyptian authorities to turn back on 17 February, ostensibly because it was still too dangerous to edge around the Edgar Bonnet.

III. Ancillary services--tugs, pilots, signal equipment--necessary to resume operations of the canal are reported adequate at least for the reduced volume of traffic which might be expected initially.